MARVEL

#1

CIVIL WAR II

THE OATH

NICK SPENCER
ROD REIS

EAGLE ONE APPROACHING--

WE HAVE CLEARANCE TO LAND-- LOOK ALIVE!

S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER ILIAD.

ALL AGENTS, ALL SPECIALISTS-- HIDE YOUR BEERS AND CLOSE OUT THOSE FACEBOOK ACCOUNTS--

--CAPTAIN AMERICA IS ON DECK.

SIR!

AT EASE, SOLDIER.

GOOD EVENING, SIR--IT'S--IT'S ALL READY FOR YOU, JUST LIKE YOU ASKED.

THANK YOU.

IT'S AN HONOR, SIR--AND--IF I MAY SPEAK FREELY?

GO RIGHT AHEAD.

WE ALL WATCHED YOU THIS AFTERNOON, DOWN IN THE REC, SIR AND--IT'S JUST--

--IT'S GOOD TO BE ***INSPIRED*** AGAIN, YOU KNOW? BEEN, UM...A LOT OF TURNOVER THESE LAST FEW YEARS, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN--

I DO. AND THAT'S ABOUT TO END--

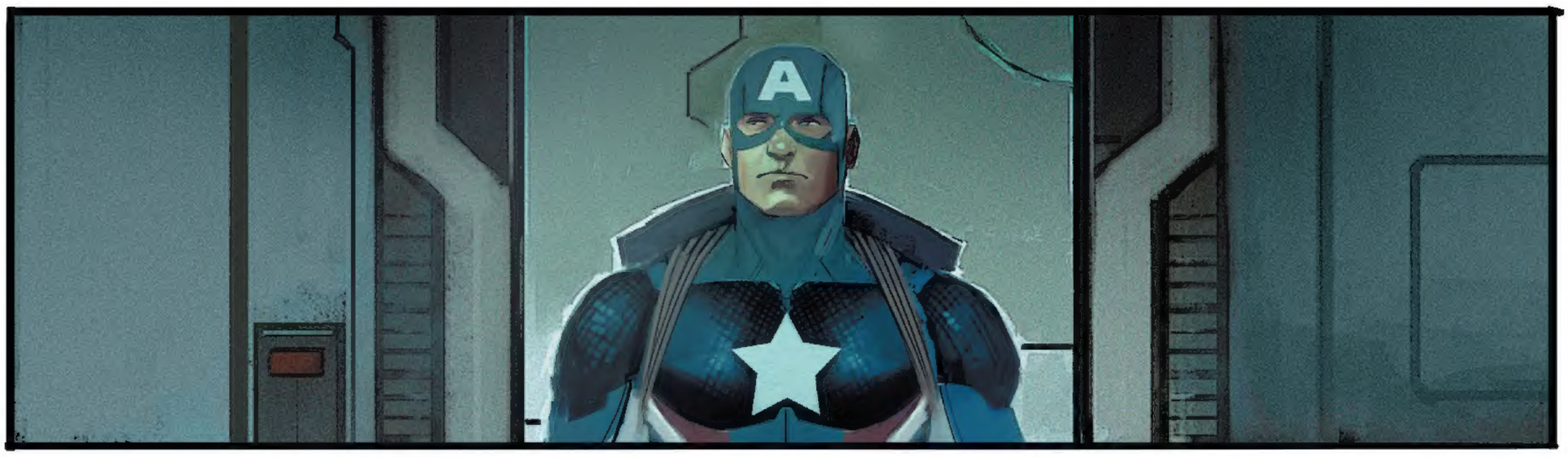
--I CAN PROMISE YOU THAT MUCH.

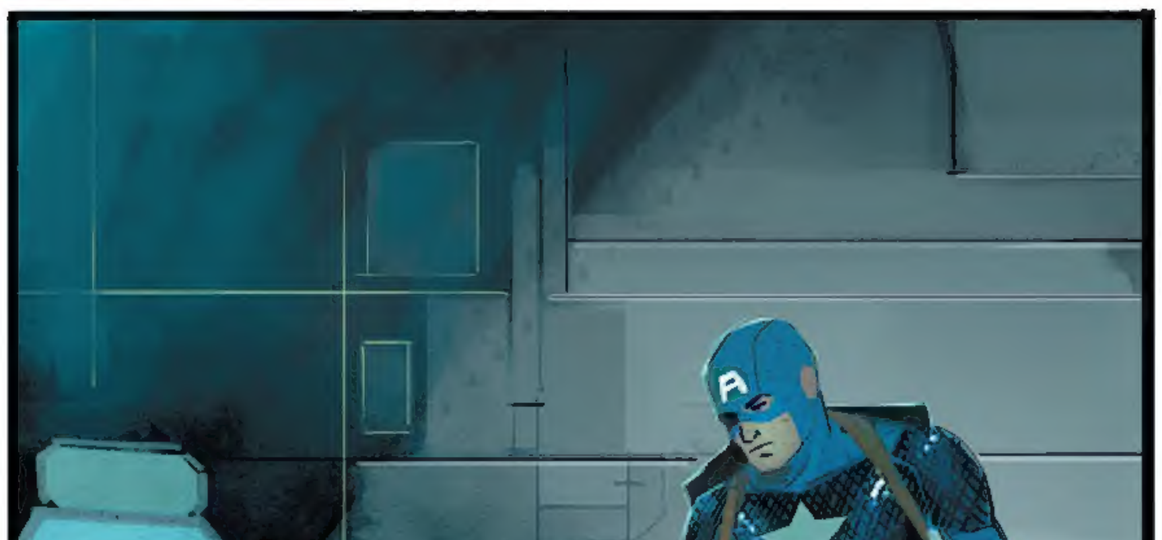
YES, SIR--WELL, YOUR GUEST--OR ***WHATEVER***--IS RIGHT IN THERE. THE ROOM IS TOTALLY QUIET, SWEPT IT MYSELF. JUST LIKE YOU ASKED.

I GOT THAT PART.

YES, SIR. AND IF YOU NEED ANYTHING--WATER, JUICE, COFFEE--I GOTTA IMAGINE YOU'RE PRETTY BEAT AT THIS POINT--

YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

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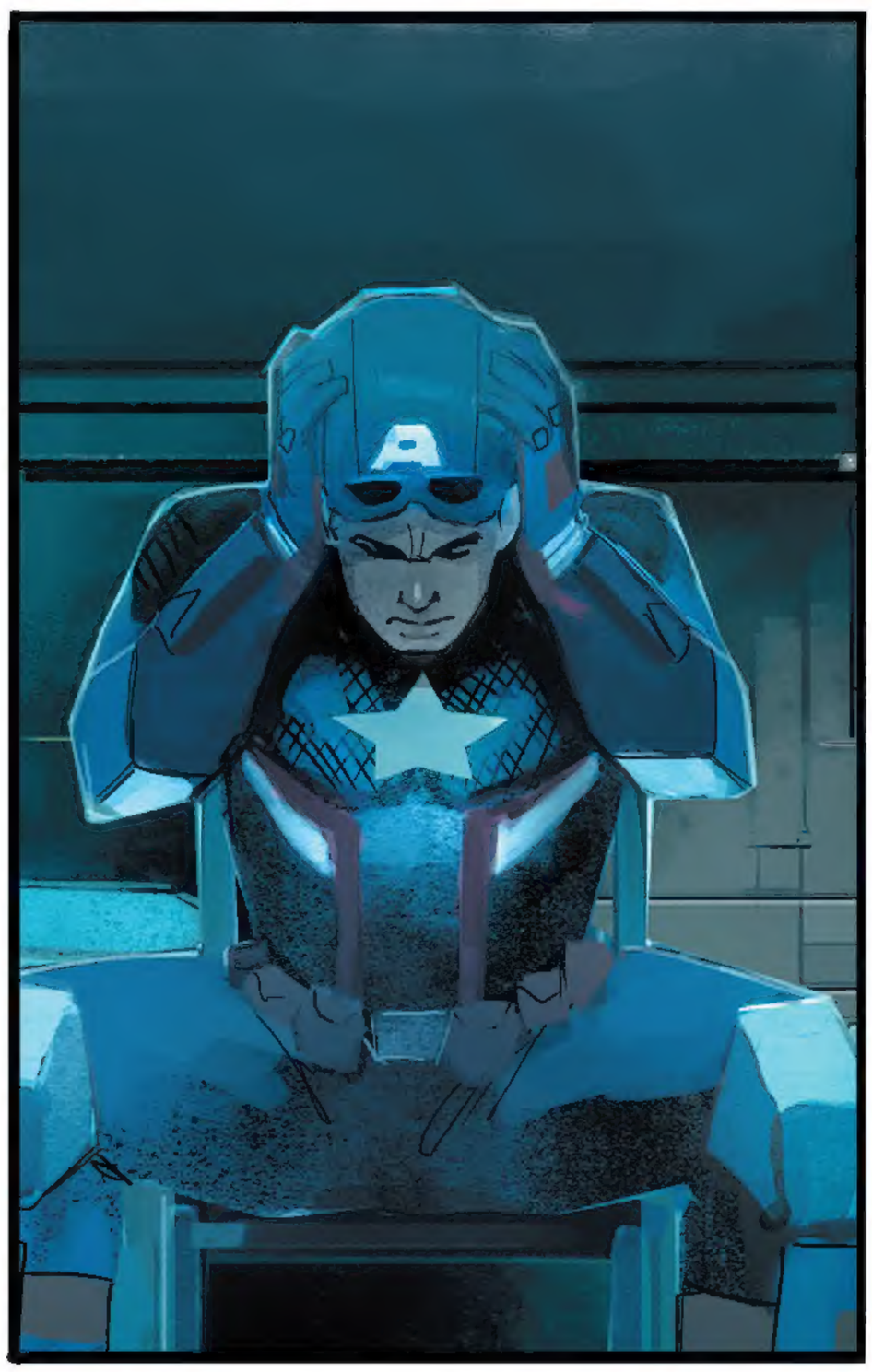

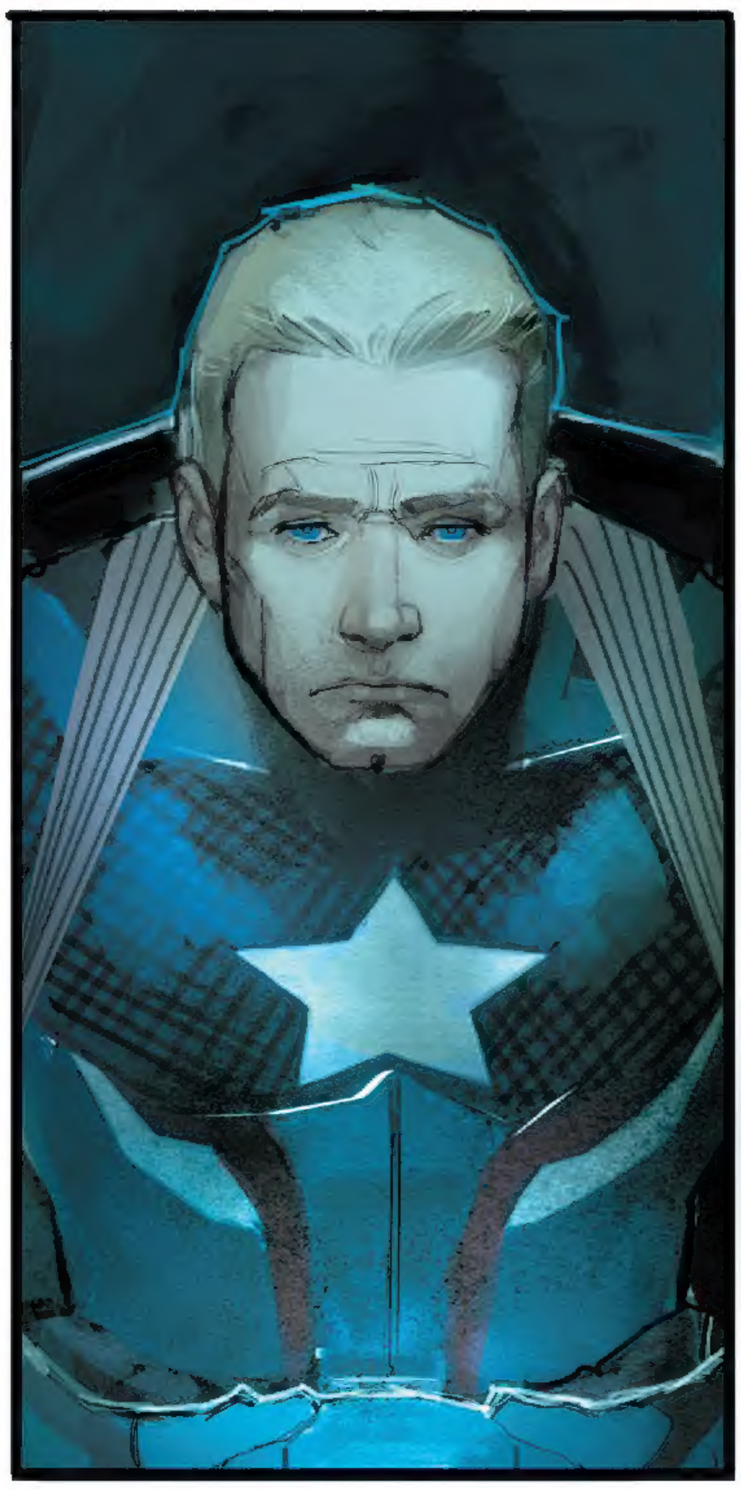

SIGH

WHAT A WASTE.

CIVIL WAR II

THE OATH

A NEW INHUMAN NAMED ULYSSES, WHO CLAIMED TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE FUTURE, SPARKED A CIVIL WAR IN THE SUPER HERO COMMUNITY. CAPTAIN MARVEL BELIEVED THAT IF SHE HAD A CHANCE TO AVERT CATASTROPHE AND SAVE LIVES, SHE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ACT. BUT IRON MAN BELIEVED THAT ULYSSES' OWN BIASES AND EXPERIENCES INFLUENCED HIS VISIONS, AND CLAIMED THAT ACTING ON THEM WAS NO DIFFERENT THAN PROFILING.

A PREDICTION THAT THE YOUNGER SPIDER-MAN WOULD KILL STEVE ROGERS LURED CAPTAIN MARVEL AND IRON MAN INTO A VIOLENT FINAL CLASH OVER THE CAPITOL BUILDING-- A CLASH THAT LEFT TONY STARK CRITICALLY INJURED. IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE BATTLE, ULYSSES EVOLVED BEYOND HUMAN PERCEPTION AND VANISHED, ENDING THE WAR.

BUT CAPTAIN AMERICA WAS RECENTLY TURNED INTO AN UNDERCOVER HYDRA AGENT BY A COSMIC CUBE, AND THERE MAY BE EVEN DARKER THINGS ON THE HORIZON...

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BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I *HAD* BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS, TONY-- I WAS JUST WAITING FOR THIS WAR TO END FOR MY CHANCE.

I WANTED US TO TALK. *ARGUE*, EVEN-- LIKE WE ALWAYS DID.

BUT I GUESS YOU'RE IN NO SHAPE TO DO THAT NOW.

I'M SO SORRY THAT THIS HAD TO HAPPEN TO YOU. ESPECIALLY LIKE THIS.

AND I KNOW YOU'RE GOING TO COME BACK FROM IT, SOMEDAY. YOU'RE GOING TO FIX YOURSELF--BECAUSE THAT'S THE KIND OF THING YOU *DO*. YOU REINVENT THE RULES. YOU CHANGE THE PARADIGMS. ANSWER TO NO ONE, NOT EVEN *DEATH*.

I'M JEALOUS OF THAT SOMETIMES, YOU KNOW. WHEN YOU PLEDGE YOUR LIFE AND LOYALTY TO AN INSTITUTION, THE WAY I'VE ALWAYS DONE, YOU LEARN TO...EXIST WITHIN ITS LIMITATIONS. YOU BECOME, IN SOME WAYS, SOMETHING SMALLER. LESS *FREE*.

BUT *YOU*, YOU'VE ONLY EVER BEEN LIMITED BY *YOURSELF*. AND YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ANY CEILING AT ALL.

SO YEAH, YOU'LL HEAL. THAT'S NO OBSTACLE FOR THE GREAT TONY STARK. BUT THE *REAL* WOUND--AND I RECALL THIS FROM EXPERIENCE--

--IS KNOWING THAT A *FRIEND* DID THIS TO YOU. SOMEONE YOU *TRUSTED*. SOMEONE YOU *CARED* ABOUT. THAT'S THE PART YOU WON'T SHAKE. THE HUMILIATION AND THE BETRAYAL.

AND THAT'S WHY I WANTED US TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK FREELY--HONESTLY. SOMETHING I DON'T GET A LOT OF CHANCES TO DO THESE DAYS. BECAUSE THERE ARE THINGS I NEED TO TELL YOU, TRUTHS I NEED TO GET OUT IN THE OPEN.

YOU SEE, I'M NOT THE MAN YOU THINK I AM, TONY--

--BUT I AM STILL WHO I AM. THAT'S THE FIRST TRUTH.

I DON'T KNOW WHEN YOU ALL STARTED TO REALLY LOSE TOUCH--WHEN YOU FORGOT WHO YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE FIGHTING FOR--BUT YOU DID.

AND BEFORE YOU KNEW IT, ALL YOUR BIGGEST BATTLES WERE WITH EACH OTHER.

NOW, YOU'D TELL ME THAT'S NOT FAIR. THAT YOU AND DANVERS WERE BOTH ARGUING ABOUT HOW TO MAKE THE WORLD SAFER--THAT YOUR MOTIVES WERE PURE.

YOU'D SAY THAT BECAUSE IT'S THE LIE YOU'VE BEEN TELLING YOURSELF THE ENTIRE TIME.

THE FACT IS, THIS WAS ABOUT ***AUTHORITY.*** YOU WEREN'T WILLING TO PLEDGE FEALTY TO THE FUTURE--BECAUSE THAT WOULD MEAN PLEDGING FEALTY TO SOMETHING BESIDES ***YOURSELF.*** IT WAS MORE ***HUBRIS*** THAN ***PRINCIPLE.***

AND I KNOW THAT BECAUSE, IN THE ***LAST*** WAR, YOU HAD NO PROBLEM TELLING ALL OF US TO ACCEPT ***YOUR*** AUTHORITY.

THE SECOND IS THAT I ALWAYS KNEW THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO YOU.

NOT BECAUSE I ENGINEERED IT, UNDERSTAND. AND NOT BECAUSE SOMEONE SHOWED ME THE FUTURE--

--BUT BECAUSE THIS WAS ***ALWAYS*** WHERE YOU WERE GOING TO END UP. ALL OF YOU.

I GUESS YOU CAN'T REALLY BE BLAMED, THOUGH, CAN YOU? THE SYSTEM YOU LIVE IN IS SO CORRUPT FROM TOP TO BOTTOM IT COULDN'T HELP BUT INFECT YOU.

BUT WHILE YOU WERE BUSY FIGHTING AMONGST YOURSELVES? YOU ***MISSED*** SOMETHING.

PEOPLE--THE NAMELESS, FACELESS PEOPLE YOU APPOINTED YOURSELVES THE GUARDIANS OF--THEY DECIDED THEY'D HAD ***ENOUGH.*** THEY WANTED TO FEEL SAFE AND PROTECTED, AND THEY FINALLY REALIZED YOU DON'T ACTUALLY HAVE THE STRENGTH TO GET THEM THERE.

THEY STARTED TO DEMAND SOMETHING BETTER. AND ON THAT FRONT--

--IT'S ACTUALLY BEEN A ***VERY*** GOOD DAY.

EARLIER.

--WE NOW GO LIVE TO CAPITOL HILL, WHERE STEVE ROGERS--CAPTAIN AMERICA--IS BEING SWORN IN AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.--IN THE KIND OF GALA CEREMONY USUALLY RESERVED FOR HEADS OF STATE--

THIS WILL BE ROGERS' SECOND STINT AS DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D., THE FIRST COMING AFTER THE DISSOLUTION OF H.A.M.M.E.R. AND NORMAN OSBORN'S SIEGE OF ASGARD, WHEN THE WORLD WAS STILL RECOVERING FROM THE EVENTS OF THE FIRST SUPERHUMAN CIVIL WAR.

THIS TENURE IS LIKELY TO BE MARKEDLY DIFFERENT, HOWEVER--

--IN LARGE PART THANKS TO THE NEWLY PASSED S.H.I.E.L.D. ACT, WHICH WAS JUST SIGNED INTO LAW WITH BIPARTISAN SUPPORT IN CONGRESS.

THE ACT DRAMATICALLY EXPANDS S.H.I.E.L.D.'S AUTHORITY WITHIN THE UNITED STATES--IN AREAS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT, MASS SURVEILLANCE, AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION--EVEN ALLOWING THE ORGANIZATION TO BECOME A DE FACTO "TOP COP" IN THE EVENT OF A NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY.

MANY NATIONAL SECURITY EXPERTS WERE QUICK TO SOUND ALARM BELLS.

ANY TIME WE CONSOLIDATE THIS MUCH POWER IN ONE INDIVIDUAL, IT'S ALMOST INEVITABLE THAT WE SEE ABUSE. AND OBVIOUSLY, CAPTAIN AMERICA IS NO ORDINARY MAN, BUT THE **PRECEDENT** THAT THIS SETS--

THERE'S LITTLE CHANCE OUR CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW CAN SURVIVE THIS.

James Green

BUT OTHERS--LIKE COMMENTATOR HARRY HAUSER--DISAGREE--

WHAT THIS DOES IS SIMPLE--IT CLEARS OUT THE BUREAUCRACY AND THE CORRUPTION. IT GIVES CONTROL BACK TO THE **PEOPLE!**

I MEAN, LOOK AT OUR CHOICES IN THIS LAST CIVIL WAR--A LEFT-COAST TECH BILLIONAIRE AND AN ESTABLISHMENT NEOCON HAWK. PEOPLE ARE TIRED OF BEING RULED BY OUT-OF-TOUCH ELITES WHO ARE ONLY LOOKING TO GAIN MORE INFLUENCE FOR THEMSELVES!

THEY WANT A **REAL** LEADER, SOMEONE WHO WILL STAND UP FOR THEM--AND HAS THE POWER TO GET THINGS DONE.

Harry Hauser

AND WITH LOOMING THREATS OF TERRORISM AND INVASION ON THE HORIZON, MANY HEROES WHO SERVE WITH ROGERS WERE QUICK TO SHOW THEIR SUPPORT--

LOOK, IF THIS WAS ANYONE ELSE, I MIGHT BE WORRIED. BUT THIS IS STEVE ROGERS. I TRUST THE MAN WITH MY LIFE.

AND IF HE SAYS THIS IS SOMETHING HE NEEDS, THEN I SAY WE GIVE IT TO HIM. BECAUSE--LOOKING AROUND AT WHERE WE ARE RIGHT NOW? PRETTY CLEAR TO ME--

--WE NEED CAPTAIN AMERICA MORE THAN EVER.

Sam Wilson

A SENTIMENT ECHOED BY THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS WHO HAVE COME TO SEE HIM SWORN IN.

I--I THINK HE'S GONNA MAKE US SAFE. HE'S GONNA CLEAN UP THIS MESS, AND HE'S GONNA MAKE US **PROUD.**

WE'RE FINALLY GONNA HAVE SOMEONE IN THERE THAT KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOIN', 'CAUSE GOOD LORD--

Jason Henry

"--THEM OTHERS GOT PLENTY TO ANSWER FOR."

Kr-sssh!!

AND NOW, STEVE ROGERS IS PREPARING TO ADDRESS THE CROWD--

TURN THAT @#&! OFF, WOLF.

IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE AFFECTING YOUR AIM, HAWKEYE.

YEAH, WELL--IT'S MESSING WITH MY BLOOD PRESSURE. LIKE LOOKING THROUGH OLD PHOTOS OF AN EX OR SOMETHING. DIFFERENT LIFE.

YOU DON'T THINK THEY SAVED YOU A SEAT AT THEIR FANCY PARTY?

HMPH. DOUBT IT. STEVE WOULDN'T WANT ME THERE-- ***NONE*** OF THEM WOULD--

"--NOT AFTER WHAT I DID."

ARE YOU GOING TO BLAME YOURSELF FOR BANNER FOREVER? IT WAS A MERCY KILLING. IF YOUR FRIENDS CAN'T FORGIVE THAT, PERHAPS THEY WERE NEVER YOUR FRIENDS IN THE FIRST PLACE. AND THE WORK YOU DID--

IT DOESN'T MATTER. WHAT WE'RE DOING OUT HERE IS MORE IMPORTANT. LET ***THEM*** WORRY ABOUT THANOS OR WHATEVER THE HELL IT IS THIS WEEK. WE'LL BE OUT HERE HELPING REAL FOLKS. TRUST ME--

"--I WANT TO BE AS FAR AWAY FROM ALL THAT AS POSSIBLE."

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

WASP?!

SPIDER-MAN. SPIDER-MAN TWO? I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO CALL YOU NOW THAT I'M WORKING WITH THE OTHER ONE. WHY ARE YOU UP HERE?

GUESS I COULD ASK YOU THE SAME THING--

ME? I'M LATE FOR THE BIG SHOW. DON'T WORRY--I DON'T THINK I'LL HAVE A HARD TIME SNEAKING IN. BUT THEN I SEE SPIDER-MAN TWO UP HERE--

OKAY, YOU CAN STOP CALLING ME THAT.

FINE BY ME. YOU CAN BE SPIDER-MAN ONE. I LIKE YOU BETTER ANYWAY. BUT MY QUESTION--

WHAT AM I DOING HERE? YEAH. WELL, THE REST OF THE CHAMPIONS ARE UP ON STAGE, BUT I FIGURED IT'D BE BETTER IF I HUNG BACK.

WHY?

ARE YOU KIDDING? ME, STEVE ROGERS, CAPITOL BUILDING? YOU KNOW, THE WHOLE VISION THING THAT ULYSSES GUY HAD?

"I'M THE GUY THAT KILLS CAPTAIN AMERICA."

BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THE FIGHT'S ***OVER.*** YOU ***DIDN'T*** KILL HIM. FUTURE BOY WAS WRONG.

÷SIGH÷ WHY DOES EVERYBODY THINK THAT? JUST BECAUSE IT DIDN'T HAPPEN ***THEN*** DOESN'T MEAN IT ***WON'T*** HAPPEN--

--IT JUST MEANS IT DIDN'T HAPPEN ***THAT DAY.***

OH. I SEE. SO WHY DID YOU EVEN COME, THEN? WHY NOT JUST STAY BACK IN NEW YORK OR SOMETHING? WOULDN'T THAT BE SAFER?

I DUNNO...I GUESS I JUST--I WANTED TO AT LEAST BE ABLE TO ***HEAR*** IT--

"--NOT EVERY DAY HISTORY GETS MADE."

I UNDERSTAND THE FEAR YOU FEEL.

YOU'RE LOOKING AROUND YOU AT A WORLD YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE ANYMORE. A WORLD THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO MAKE ***SENSE*** TO YOU ANYMORE.

I'VE BEEN THERE. WHEN THEY PULLED ME OUT OF THE ICE, I WOKE UP TO SO MANY CHANGES--SOME AMAZING. NEW TECHNOLOGIES THAT MADE OUR LIVES EASIER. ADVANCES IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND A GROWING YEARNING FOR PEACE.

BUT OTHERS WERE ***TERRIFYING.***

DOOMSDAY WEAPONS. PEOPLE BEING BORN WITH STRANGE ABILITIES THEY COULDN'T CONTROL. GODS WALKING THE EARTH.

WHAT I LEARNED--WHAT HELPED ME ***COPE*** WITH THAT--IS AN UNDERSTANDING THAT THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY REALLY DO STAY THE SAME.

THAT THERE ARE VALUES WE HOLD--BELIEFS THAT WE HAVE--THAT ARE TIMELESS, AND REMAIN TRUE IN THE FACE OF ANY THREAT.

AND WE DO FACE SOME THREATS NOW. PERHAPS MORE THAN EVER BEFORE. THEY'VE CERTAINLY BECOME MORE ***INSIDIOUS.***

STRATEGIC HOMELAND INTERVENTION ENFORCEMENT

"THIS NEW HYDRA AND ITS TERRORISTIC ATTACKS HAVE MADE AMERICANS AFRAID TO CONGREGATE IN PUBLIC AND DISTRUSTFUL OF THEIR OWN NEIGHBORS--WHILE THEY SPREAD A MESSAGE OF ***HATE*** TO THE ***MOST VULNERABLE*** AMONG US.

"UNKNOWN MONSTERS FROM BEYOND THE STARS FILL US WITH A SENSE OF OMINOUS DREAD, MAKING US QUESTION OUR PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE.

"AND THEN THERE ARE THE MONSTERS WE KNOW ALL TOO WELL--THE ONES WE'VE STRUGGLED AGAINST FOR SO LONG--

"--THE ONES WHO WOULD SEEK TO TEAR DOWN EVERYTHING WE'VE WORKED ***SO HARD*** TO BUILD."

FACED WITH ALL OF THIS, YOU TURNED TO US--AND THIS IS WHERE IT'S HIGH TIME SOMEONE WAS HONEST WITH YOU--

--WE LET YOU DOWN.

WHEN YOU NEEDED US THE MOST, WE LET OURSELVES GET DISTRACTED BY OUR OWN PETTY SQUABBLES AND THIRST FOR POWER.

WHETHER IT WAS THROUGH CARELESSNESS OR CORRUPTION, WE FAILED YOU, AND WE LET THESE DANGERS GET MUCH TOO CLOSE TO OUR DOORSTEP--BUT I AM HERE TO PROMISE YOU NOW--

--THAT WILL *NEVER* HAPPEN AGAIN.

I SPEAK FOR EVERYONE SERVING UNDER THE S.H.I.E.L.D. BANNER--AND EVERYONE ON THIS PLATFORM--WHEN I SAY THAT, FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, WE ARE GOING TO REDOUBLE OUR EFFORTS.

WE ARE GOING TO REAFFIRM OUR SOLEMN COMMITMENT TO YOU--TO PROTECT THIS COUNTRY AND THIS WORLD FROM ALL THOSE WHO WOULD DO US HARM.

PEOPLE *WILL* FEEL SAFE AGAIN.

NOW, I UNDERSTAND THE ENORMITY OF THIS MOMENT. NEVER IN OUR HISTORY HAS ONE PERSON BEEN TRUSTED WITH THIS MUCH POWER.

AND TRUTH BE TOLD, I WAS RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT IT. I DID NOT ASK FOR THIS ROLE, NOR DID I SEEK IT. IN FACT--

--I WASN'T EVEN MY *OWN* FIRST CHOICE.

BUT WHEN I LOOKED AT THE CHALLENGES BEFORE US--AND THE DEFEATS THAT PRECEDED THEM--I REALIZED THERE WAS NO DECISION TO BE MADE AT ALL.

THAT NONE OF US COULD AFFORD TO DO LESS THAN EVERYTHING OUR ABILITIES ALLOWED.

AND SO I ACCEPT THIS POSITION WITH A HEAVY HEART, AND A DESIRE TO SEE ITS AUTHORITY AND REACH DIMINISHED THE MOMENT IT IS NO LONGER NEEDED.

UNTIL THAT DAY, THOUGH, I WILL WORK TO HONOR THIS SACRED TRUST THAT YOU HAVE PLACED IN ME--TO USE THESE POWERS RESPONSIBLY AND IN KEEPING WITH THOSE VALUES WE HOLD SO DEAR.

BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT'S REALLY WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT--

--NOT TO JUST AVOID CATASTROPHE OR DESTRUCTION, BUT TO USE THESE ADVERSITIES TO MAKE OURSELVES SOMETHING ***STRONGER***--

--TO FORGE SOMETHING ***GREAT*** FROM THE FIRES THEY WOULD SEE BURN.

THAT'S MY CALL TO ALL OF YOU--TO ***ASSEMBLE***. ASSEMBLE UNDER ONE BANNER--FROM THE AVENGERS TO S.H.I.E.L.D. TO THE UNITED STATES AND OUR ALLIES TO THE WORLD SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE UNITED NATIONS--

--TO EVERY, MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD WHO BELIEVES IN GOOD ON THIS EARTH.

LET'S NOT JUST SEEK TO ***SURVIVE*** THESE TRAGEDIES--LET'S BUILD SOMETHING ***BETTER***, SOMETHING ***NOBLER***, SOMETHING ***TRUER*** IN THE FACE OF THEM. LET'S NOT JUST SAVE THIS WORLD--

--LET'S PROVE THIS IS A WORLD ***WORTH*** SAVING.

I LIKE TO THINK YOU WOULD'VE BEEN PROUD, TONY.

BUT I DON'T KNOW--YOU PROBABLY WOULD'VE FOUND SOME EXCUSE TO STAND IN MY WAY.

I MEAN, THAT'S YOU, ISN'T IT?

THE FUTURIST. SO IN LOVE WITH HIS OWN VISION OF WHAT'S TO COME THAT HE'D RATHER START A WAR THAN ACCEPT SOMEONE ELSE'S.

I'M DOUBTFUL YOU WOULD'VE BEEN ABLE TO COMMIT TO SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOURSELF, BECAUSE--WELL, YOU ***NEVER*** BELIEVED THERE COULD ***BE*** SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOURSELF. BUT NOW I'M JUST BELABORING THE POINT.

STILL--I THINK YOU WOULD'VE AT LEAST BEEN IMPRESSED.

TO SEE PEOPLE UNITED, WORKING TOWARDS A SINGULAR GOAL, BELIEVING THAT THINGS COULD BE BETTER. I KNOW YOU ALWAYS FELT LIKE YOU STRUGGLED TO ***INSPIRE*** PEOPLE--

--BUT THAT'S BECAUSE YOU COULD NEVER UNDERSTAND THAT IT ISN'T ABOUT ***YOU***. NOT ABOUT WHAT YOU CREATED, OR WHAT YOU'VE DONE, OR WHAT YOU'RE ***GOING*** TO DO.

IT'S ABOUT ***THEM***. AND BEST I CAN TELL, YOU NEVER HAD MUCH ***USE*** FOR THEM. NEVER ***THOUGHT*** MUCH OF THEM. ALWAYS BELIEVED YOU WERE BETTER. ***SMARTER***.

BUT THEY'RE SMARTER THAN YOU THINK, TONY. THEY KNOW WHEN THEY'RE BEING LIED TO--

CHINK!

"--AND THEY KNOW WHO'S ***REALLY*** ON THEIR SIDE."

CONGRATULATIONS AGAIN, CAPTAIN. PLEASE KNOW THAT YOU HAVE FULL SUPPORT OF THE KINGDOM OF WAKANDA.

I APPRECIATE THAT, T'CHALLA. LET'S DO A ONE-ON-ONE SOON--THERE ARE SOME INTELLIGENCE-SHARING PROPOSALS I WANT TO RUN PAST YOU--

UH-OH--

BETTER HOLD ON TO YOUR WALLET, YOUR HIGHNESS. I'VE SEEN THE *BUDGETS*.

LOVELY TO SEE YOU, COMMANDER CARTER.

IT IS QUITE A PARTY.

IT SHOULD'VE BEEN YOU UP THERE TODAY, SHARON.

IF IT HAD BEEN ME, THEY WOULD'VE DONE IT IN THE COAT-ROOM OF THE RUSSELL BUILDING. THIS ONLY WORKS BECAUSE IT'S YOU, STEVE--

--*YOU'RE* WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS RIGHT NOW.

AND I NEED YOU.

SEE? IT ALL WORKS OUT FOR EVERYONE, THEN--

CRASH!

THE HELL WAS THAT?

THERE'S ALWAYS A PRICE AT AN OPEN BAR.

YOU THINK THIS IS *FUNNY?!*

I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING-- GET *OFFA* ME, KID!

BOTH OF YOU--BREAK IT UP--

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?!

HE SHOULDN'T *BE* HERE--*NONE* OF THEM SHOULD!

AMADEUS--

NO! I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! BRUCE IS *DEAD* BECAUSE OF THEM! *AND* RHODES! STARK IS IN A *TUBE!*

NOW WE'RE ALL JUST SUPPOSED TO STAND AROUND TOGETHER AND SIP CHAMPAGNE AS IF NOTHING EVER *HAPPENED?!* PRETEND IT'S ALL *OKAY?!* THEY'RE *LAUGHING* AT US--

SON, THIS IS NOT THE TIME OR THE PLACE--

I'D LISTEN TO THE MAN, CHO...

...MANNERS WERE BIG IN HIS DAY.

AND IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE COMPANY, WELL-- IT'S EASY TO EXCUSE YOURSELF EARLY. *POLITELY.*

...

FINE. FOOD AT THIS THING WAS TERRIBLE, ANYHOW. *CANAPES.* DISGUSTING.

CAROL. YOU CHANGED.

I HAVE TO GET BACK TO THE OFFICE.

WELL, BEFORE YOU GO--

WE SHOULD TALK. YEAH...

"...IT'S BEEN A BIG WEEK."

THE WHITE HOUSE.
DAYS EARLIER.

WE CALL IT THE PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD, MR. PRESIDENT. AN IMPENETRABLE FORCE FIELD DESIGNED TO STOP THE EARTHBOUND FLOW OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL TRAVEL--HOSTILE OR OTHERWISE-- IN ITS TRACKS.

COLONEL DANVERS, WHEN YOU SAY "*IMPENETRABLE*"--

WE NEED TO DO THE FIELD TESTING, BUT ON PAPER, IT LOOKS LIKE GALACTUS HIMSELF COULDN'T BRING THIS THING DOWN, SIR. IT ***WILL*** PERFORM AS ADVERTISED.

AND THAT'S IMPORTANT GIVEN WHERE WE ARE RIGHT NOW.

THIS LAST CIVIL WAR STARTED BECAUSE ***THANOS*** AND A ***CELESTIAL*** WERE ABLE TO JUST SHOW UP AND NOT SEE A SINGLE BIT OF RESISTANCE UNTIL THEY MADE LANDFALL.

AND WE'RE LOOKING AT THIS INCOMING CHITAURI FLEET-- WHICH IS THE LARGEST SINGLE ALIEN ARMY TO EVER COME OUR WAY, EVEN BIGGER THAN THE ANNIHILATION WAVE-- GETTING CLOSER EVERY DAY. WE ***NEED*** TO BE READY, SIR.

HM. IT'S CERTAINLY AN INTRIGUING PROPOSAL. I'LL NEED TO CONSULT WITH CONGRESS, AND STEVE ROGERS--

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, SIR, I DON'T THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA. YOU'RE AWARE OF THE POLITICS AT PLAY HERE--THIS TECHNOLOGY WAS BROUGHT TO ME BY MARIA HILL, THE ***FORMER*** DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D.

NO ONE ADMIRES STEVE MORE THAN I DO, BUT--I'M CONCERNED HE MIGHT BE A BIT BIASED AGAINST IT.

BUT BEYOND THAT--IF WE'RE GOING TO MOVE FORWARD WITH THIS, I NEED TO HAVE COMPLETE AUTONOMY. I NEED TO KNOW THAT STEVE MIGHT BE THE AUTHORITY DOWN HERE, BUT *I'M* IN CHARGE UP THERE.

WELL, I...

LOOK, MR. PRESIDENT-- THE LAST TIME I WAS HERE YOU ASKED ME WHAT I WANTED TO DO GOING FORWARD. YOU PUT A LOT OF...*IMPRESSIVE* OPTIONS ON THE TABLE.

AND I TOLD YOU I'D BEEN THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE. WELL, THIS IS IT--

--*THIS* IS OUR FUTURE.

ONE WHERE WE CONTROL OUR *OWN* DESTINY.

I THINK I UNDERSTAND WHY THE TWO OF YOU FOUGHT SO MUCH, TONY--

--SHE'S TURNING OUT TO BE JUST LIKE YOU.

BACK WHEN WANDA GAVE ALL OF US THE LIVES WE SECRETLY WANTED-- YOU REMEMBER WHAT ***HERS*** WAS?

CAPTAIN MARVEL. THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPER HERO. LOVED BY EVERYONE. ADORED BY BILLIONS.

I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SORRY FOR HER, IN A WAY. TO BE *THAT* DESPERATE FOR APPROVAL, TO HAVE NEVER LEARNED HOW TO FIND IT IN YOURSELF, TO HAVE TO CONSTANTLY SEEK IT OUT IN OTHERS.

IT'S AMAZING HOW IT ALWAYS ***BACKFIRES.*** HOW THE PEOPLE WHO NEED EVERYONE TO LIKE THEM ALWAYS END UP BEING THE MOST ***HATED.***

THE TRUTH IS--AND I THINK YOU'D LOVE TO HEAR IT AND SHE'D NEVER ADMIT IT--SHE LET THIS WAR GET AS BAD AS IT DID FOR ONE SIMPLE REASON--

--SHE COULDN'T STOP TRYING TO PROVE TO HERSELF THAT SHE WAS ***BETTER*** THAN YOU. COULDN'T STOP FEELING LIKE THE OVERLOOKED SIBLING.

WHICH WOULD BE UNDERSTANDABLE ENOUGH, I SUPPOSE, IF IT WEREN'T FOR ALL THE COLLATERAL DAMAGE.

SHE JUST CAN'T STOP TRYING TO REACH THE TOP OF THAT MOUNTAIN, SO SHE NEVER REALIZES-- THE MORE BODIES SHE STEPS OVER--

"--THE DEEPER THE HOLE SHE DIGS FOR HERSELF."

YOU'RE ANGRY WITH ME.

NO, THAT'S-- THAT'S NOT TRUE--

WHAT WOULD YOU CALL IT, THEN?

DISAPPOINTMENT.

OH, GOD, GIVE ME ANGRY.

CAROL, LOOK AROUND YOU--YOU ***WON.*** THE PRESIDENT GAVE YOU A MEDAL. PEOPLE ARE ***CHEERING*** FOR YOU.

YEAH, DOWN THERE, NOT IN HERE.

THAT'S BECAUSE OUR FRIENDS ARE STILL AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS. YOU'VE TOLD THEM TO STOP FIGHTING, BUT YOU HAVEN'T GIVEN THEM A ***REASON*** TO.

CONSIDER FIGURING OUT HOW TO BRING THEM BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

STEVE, THE SOFT SELL--YOU KNOW IT'S NOT MY SPECIALTY. IT'S JUST NOT HOW I'M BUILT.

FOR GOOD LEADERS, THERE ARE ALWAYS MORE CONCESSIONS IN *VICTORY* THAN DEFEAT, CAROL.

THEY'LL COME AROUND. ONCE THEY SEE HOW WE GET THINGS DONE, ONCE WE START NOTCHING SOME BIG WINS--THIS WILL ALL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF.

IT WON'T. BUT WHILE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE JOB--

UH-OH--

MARIA HILL.

I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOUR GUYS-- I HAVE ***NO IDEA*** WHERE SHE IS.

YOU REALLY EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THAT?

IT'S THE TRUTH!

SHE SHOWED UP, GAVE ME THE PLANS FOR THE DEFENSE SHIELD, AND THEN RAN OFF. TO BE TOTALLY HONEST, I WAS PRETTY RELIEVED TO SEE HER GO--

AND YET NOW YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE HER MISTAKES ***FOR*** HER.

THE SHIELD IS A GOOD IDEA, STEVE.

IT *REALLY* ISN'T. AND IT'S NOT EVEN YOURS--

WELL, TECHNICALLY, HILL FOUND IT IN THE VAULT OF A DECOMMISSIONED VERSION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION, SO LEGALLY IT'S KIND OF A GRAY AREA...

CUTTING US OFF FROM THE REST OF THE UNIVERSE, ISOLATING US--THAT ISN'T A *DEFENSE*, IT'S A *MESSAGE*. YOU KNOW *EXACTLY* WHAT WE'LL BE SAYING TO EVERY LIVING THING ON BOTH SIDES OF IT.

CAP, I DON'T KNOW IF YOU NOTICED, BUT THERE'S A *WAR* COMING. THE CHITAURI FLEET IS GONNA BE IN OUR SOLAR SYSTEM *SOON*--

AND WHEN THEY COME, WE NEED TO BE READY FOR THEM. BUT WE'VE FACED THESE THINGS BEFORE--

THIS ISN'T BEFORE, THOUGH, IS IT?

NO. WE DIDN'T GIVE UP THE THINGS WE BELIEVED IN THOSE TIMES--

THANKS, I CAUGHT YOUR SPEECH.

I--I'M SORRY. IT'S BEEN A LONG MONTH.

NO--IT'S-- IT'S FINE. I DON'T MEAN TO LECTURE.

HEH. LIAR.

IT'S JUST--THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT YOU JUST DID WITH ULYSSES. YOU THINK THERE'S SOME AMOUNT OF EFFECTIVENESS THAT ALLOWS YOU TO DIVORCE A SOLUTION FROM THE *MORALITY* OF IT.

IT DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY, CAROL. IF SOMETHING IS WRONG, IT'S WRONG WHETHER IT SUCCEEDS OR NOT.

WE CAN'T JUST BECOME SLAVES TO ENDS AND MEANS. IT STILL ALL HAS TO STAND FOR SOMETHING, AND IT CAN'T JUST BE *SURVIVING.*

WE'RE *ALL* MAKING COMPROMISES RIGHT NOW--MYSELF INCLUDED. I DON'T ENVY THE DECISION YOU HAVE TO MAKE, BUT I HOPE YOU'LL LISTEN TO ME WHEN I TELL YOU THIS...

THAT SHIELD WILL PUT A CEILING ON THE BEST DREAMS WE'VE EVER HAD. IF YOU BUILD IT, YOU WILL REGRET IT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

BUT IT'S YOUR CALL. I CAN'T STOP YOU.

I KNOW YOU'RE GLAD TO FINALLY BE STEERING THE SHIP, CAROL--

--I JUST WISH YOU WOULD WATCH WHERE IT'S HEADED.

STEVE... WAIT--

IT'S TOO LATE FOR HER.

IT'S TOO LATE FOR *ALL* OF YOU.

SOMEWHERE OVER THE NATIONAL MALL WHILE YOU AND DANVERS WERE BEATING THE HELL OUT OF EACH OTHER, THE VERDICT CAME IN. THE PEOPLE MADE THEIR DECISION, AND YOU *LOST.*

AND I'M *GLAD.* DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN THE SKRULLS INFILTRATED EVERYTHING, AND EVERYONE WENT AROUND ASKING *"WHO DO YOU TRUST?"*

WELL, NOW YOU HAVE YOUR ANSWER--THEY DON'T TRUST *ANY* OF YOU. THEY WANT SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY. WHO CAN BLAME THEM?

YOU CALL YOURSELVES *"HEROES"* WHILE YOU WASTE MOST OF YOUR TIME *INFIGHTING* AND SETTLING *PETTY GRUDGES.*

YOU CALL YOURSELVES LEADERS WHILE YOU JOCKEY AROUND FOR AUTHORITY AND PECKING RIGHTS, TRYING TO MAKE YOURSELVES LOOK GOOD--

--WHILE THE TRUTH IS YOU'VE COMPLETELY DIVORCED YOURSELF FROM THE PEOPLE YOU CLAIM TO PROTECT. YOU HAVE *NO UNDERSTANDING* OF WHAT THEY WANT OR NEED FROM YOU ANYMORE.

AND I KNOW WHAT YOU WOULD SAY TO THAT--THAT FOR ALL YOUR MISTAKES, YOU'VE SAVED THE WORLD COUNTLESS TIMES OVER. BUT LOOK AROUND YOU--

--DOES THIS WORLD LOOK SAVED?

PEOPLE ARE AFRAID, YES, EVERYONE KEEPS SAYING THIS--AND IT'S BEEN TRUE FOR A VERY LONG TIME. BUT NOW--

--NOW, THEY'RE *ANGRY.*

"THEY WERE *AFRAID* WHEN ONE OF THEIR CHILDREN'S CLASSMATES SUDDENLY DEVELOPED THE ABILITY TO INCINERATE ANYONE AROUND THEM WITH A *LOOK*--

"--BUT THEY GOT *ANGRY* WHEN YOU CALLED THEM HYSTERICAL BIGOTS FOR SEEING THAT AS A THREAT TO THEIR SAFETY.

"THEY FELT *AFRAID* WHEN A NEIGHBOR THEY KNEW AND TRUSTED REVEALED THAT ABOVE THEIR COUNTRY AND COMMUNITIES, THEY NOW PLEDGED ALLEGIANCE TO AN ALIEN RACE--A RACE WITH A HISTORY OF *BRUTAL VIOLENCE* AGAINST HUMANITY--

"--BUT THEY GOT *ANGRY* WHEN YOU CALLED THEM INTOLERANT FOR NOT WANTING TO SLEEP NEXT TO THAT.

"YOU SEE, YOU ALL GET TO LIVE IN YOUR SUITS OF ARMOR AND HIDE OUT IN YOUR FORTRESSES--EVEN WHEN YOU *DIE*, YOU GET TO LIVE--

"--BUT THESE ARE *REAL PEOPLE*, TONY. THEY'RE NOT SO LUCKY. AND MAYBE THEY *DON'T* WANT THIS FORWARD-THINKING, FUTURIST UTOPIA YOU'RE BUILDING. MAYBE THEY *DON'T* WANT TO MOVE SO FAR, SO FAST."

THEY MIGHT HAVE EVEN TOLD YOU SO IF YOU EVER BOTHERED TO ASK. IF YOU HADN'T PRETENDED THEY DIDN'T EXIST.

AND THAT'S WHAT MAKES THEM THE ANGRIEST, I IMAGINE. WATCHING YOU FLYING HIGHER AND HIGHER WHILE THEY FEEL THEMSELVES SINKING LOWER AND LOWER.

YOU BUILT GLEAMING TOWERS FULL OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES, OPENED DOORWAYS TO NEW WORLDS--AND THEN YOU LEFT *THEM* BEHIND TO WALLOW IN THE DIRT.

HH. THAT YOU EVER THOUGHT IT WOULD LAST. THAT'S THE *REAL* ARROGANCE OF IT. YOU MADE YOURSELVES *GODS* AND NOW YOU WONDER WHY THE PEOPLE ARE READY TO *CRUCIFY* YOU.

AND *HE* KNEW THAT, TOO.

SEE, THAT'S THE OTHER TRUTH. LIKE I TOLD YOU BEFORE, I'M NOT THE MAN YOU THINK I AM. BUT EVERYTHING *HE* EVER DID, EVERY MEMORY, EVERY MOMENT--I CARRY IT INSIDE ME.

I KNOW EVERY THOUGHT HE EVER HAD ABOUT *YOU*, FOR INSTANCE.

HE LOVED YOU.

HE LOVED YOU, AND HE ADMIRED YOU. EVEN WHEN YOU FOUGHT.

ALL THOSE TIMES YOU THOUGHT YOU OUTSMARTED HIM? THOSE TIMES YOU THOUGHT YOU BEAT HIM?

HE *HAD* YOU. EVERY SINGLE TIME. HE COULD'VE BEATEN YOU, AND HE CHOSE INSTEAD TO GO EASY ON YOU, TO *SPARE* YOU.

YOU'D PROBABLY SMILE AND SAY THAT MADE HIM THE BETTER MAN--

--BUT I'D SAY IT MADE HIM *WEAK*. BECAUSE HE KNEW HOW ALL THIS WOULD END AS WELL, AND HE DIDN'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO DO WHAT WAS NECESSARY.

HE WAS INFECTED BY THIS... *MIRAGE*.

I'M NOT LIKE THAT, THOUGH. I AM READY TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE. WE'RE SO VERY CLOSE NOW TO SETTING THINGS RIGHT--AND I JUST CAN'T HELP MYSELF--

--FUNNY ENOUGH, IT MAKES *ME* ANGRY, TOO.

I'M ANGRY THAT YOU'RE NOT HERE FOR THIS. IN FACT, I'M HOPING--*PRAYING*--THAT YOU CAN SOMEHOW HEAR ME AND THIS PULLS YOU OUT OF YOUR SLEEP.

BECAUSE I WANT YOU TO SEE THIS, TONY. MORE THAN ANYTHING--I *NEED* YOU TO SEE WHAT I DO NEXT.

I AM GOING TO DESTROY EVERYTHING YOU EVER BUILT.

I AM GOING TO TEAR DOWN THESE INSTITUTIONS THAT YOU'VE USED TO GIVE YOURSELVES POWER. I'M GOING TO REDUCE ALL THAT YOU WORKED FOR, ALL YOU *BLED* FOR, TO A PILE OF RUBBLE AND ASH--

--AND FROM IT I AM GOING TO MAKE SOMETHING BETTER. I AM GOING TO MAKE THIS A *STRONGER* WORLD, ONE FORGED FROM *FIRE.*

SO, PLEASE--I'M BEGGING YOU--WAKE UP NOW. COME AND TRY TO STOP ME.

BUT YOU WON'T. OR YOU CAN'T. DO YOU KNOW HOW I KNOW? BECAUSE THE BOY--ULYSSES--HE SHOWED ME THE FUTURE.

I WASN'T, THOUGH. IT WAS SOMETHING I'D CARRIED IN MY OWN DREAMS FOR A LIFETIME. AND WHEN I FOUND MYSELF THERE, *FINALLY,* THANKS TO HIM--

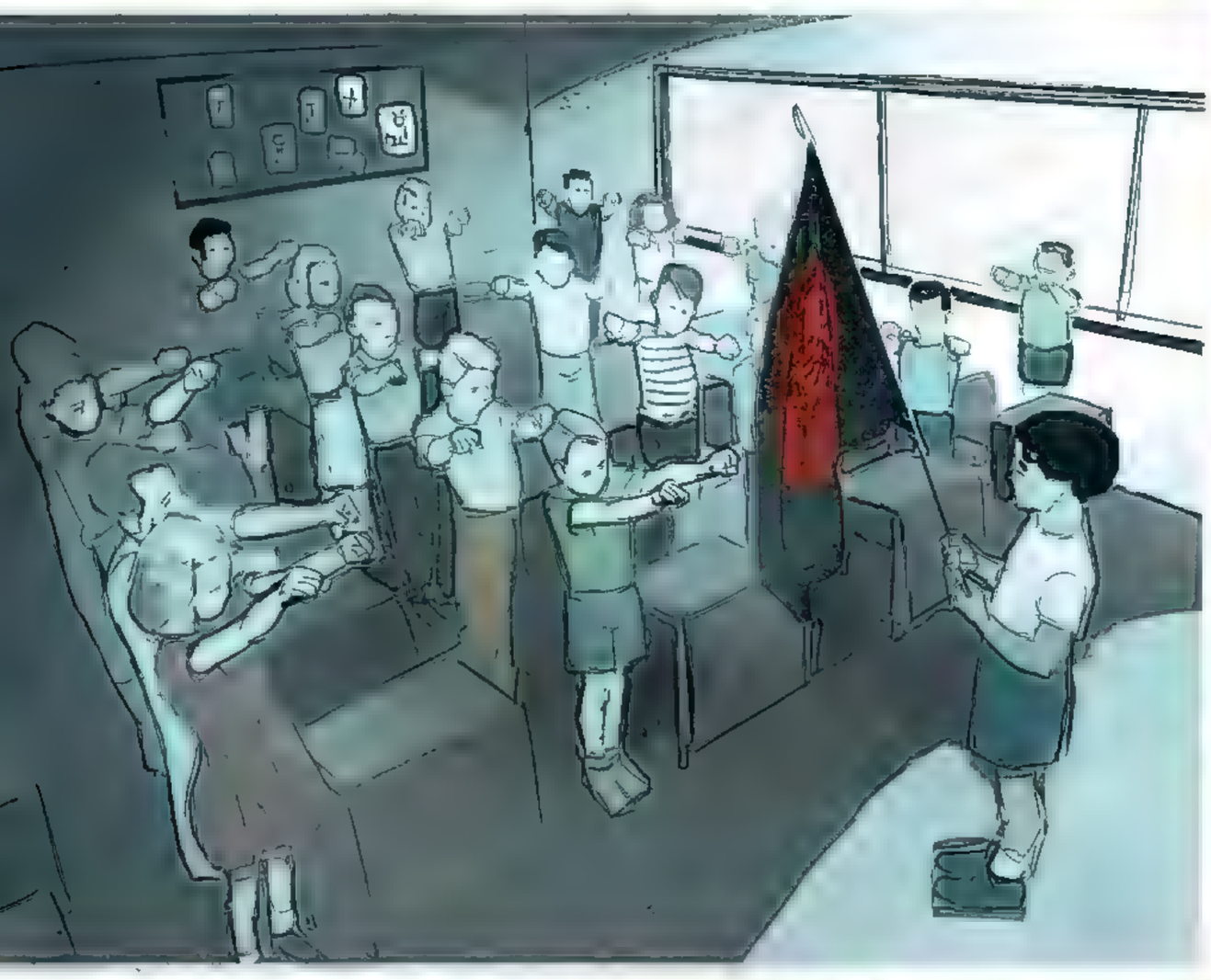
DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I SAW, TONY?

HE EVEN SHOWED IT TO ALL OF YOU AS WELL, BUT, AS USUAL, YOU WERE TOO BLIND TO SEE WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

--I TOOK IN EVERYTHING AROUND ME. I LET MY EYES OPEN, AND I FELT THE VISION TAKE ME. LET IT REVEAL THE TRUTH TO ME AND ME ALONE. UNTIL NOW.

ADD TO THE RANKS-
REGISTER TODAY
CUT OFF ONE LIMB,
TWO MORE SHALL TAKE
ITS PLACE
HAIL HYDRA!

ECONOMY SOARS TO
NEW HEIGHTS
UNDER HYDRA
LEADERSHIP
NEWS
NEWS



SECRET EMPIRE

ZONE